

Feb. 9, 2026

TO: Members of the House Committee on Rules

FR: Duke Shepard, Senior Policy Director

RE: Opposition to SB 1542

Chair Gorsek, Vice Chair Weber and Members of the Committee:

I'm Duke Shepard, senior policy director for Oregon Business & Industry.

First, as a matter of context and process, we believe it is unwise to move ahead on reshaping the decision-making for transportation in a piecemeal manner, especially when the voters have a decision in front of them that is foundational to this policy area. This is true of both the base bill and the proposed -2 amendment.

Regarding the policy proposal in the base bill, during the informational hearing on this bill, at roughly the 30-minute mark, we heard testimony about the concept of "safety washing" — labeling projects as safety projects because it is easier to secure funding, even when the investment does not meaningfully reduce serious injuries or fatalities, or is not located where safety risks are highest.

Most of us are familiar with the term "greenwashing," which the Natural Resources Defense Council defines as *"the act of making false or misleading statements about the environmental benefits of a product or practice."*

This bill introduces a similar phenomenon: "fiscal washing." It uses the rhetoric of fiscal responsibility to predetermine a narrower range of transportation policy choices and investment outcomes.

If you tell the public outright, as a matter of policy, that we will deprioritize the improvement of transportation capacity, there will be backlash. If you say we will not add lanes, address highway chokepoints, or improve freight mobility, there will be backlash. SB 1542 does not say those things explicitly, but it effectively arrives at the same place by wrapping restrictive policy choices in the language of prudent fiscal management.

First, the problem is not a lack of planning. It is poor execution, inconsistent leadership, and weak accountability. Another plan would not have prevented the rampant cost overruns presented during the 2025 session. Oregon already has no shortage of plans and processes. According to ODOT's own website, we are now in the third year of planning for the next 3-year

State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). When the planning process takes as long as - or longer than - the plan itself, the issue is not insufficient planning. The issue is failure to prioritize, execute, and deliver results. That failure is precisely why the public has lost confidence that higher taxes will translate into tangible improvements.

The bill shifts responsibility away from where it belongs. The legislature controls the purse and is accountable to the public. Creating another internal planning process further undermines representative government. When we are talking about investments measured in hundreds of millions or billions of dollars, prioritization should rest with elected legislators, not be delegated deeper into the bureaucracy.